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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the development of a set of programs called "History Comes Alive," a series of historical simulations and interactive experiences for students at heritage sites in Ontario. The programs allow students from Ontario and New York to relive the past by spending 3 days and 2 nights in a simulated historical setting. In addition to history, other curriculum areas such as music, drama, and technology are incorporated into each package. Program development involved creating an inventory of potential sites; gaining cooperation of federal, provincial, and private agencies that operate the sites; outlining the roles of the classroom teacher and site interpreters; and pilot-testing each program. The five programs take place at Fort Henry, the Rideau Canal, the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes, and the historic areas and waterfront of Kingston, Ontario. Descriptions of the Fort Henry and Rideau Canal programs illustrate common program elements: pretrip preparation, use of period costume, sleeping at least one night within the historical context, subsequent related classroom work, and a final celebration of the unit of study with parents and friends. Student responses indicate enthusiasm and engagement in the programs, while teachers note improvements in classroom climate and student responsibility, cooperation, and problem solving. Continuing efforts to keep the programs alive include development of new resource materials, strengthening the partnerships between cooperating agencies, and providing teacher inservice training. Suggestions are offered for applications in other places. (SV)

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Chapter 4

HISTORY COMES ALIVE

Gary Shultz

Gary Shultz was educated at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, with a BA, BPHE, and BEd. He has taken a strong lead in developing experiential curricula within his school district, specializing in programs which build on cooperative interaction among schools, community, and government agencies. With 18 years of teaching experience in the intermediate grades and his current experience as an elementary school vice-principal, Gary is well qualified to tell the story of experiential programs in history.

This chapter outlines the development of history programs based at heritage sites. The programs are of particular importance in the way that they demonstrate the creation and maintenance of wide-ranging cooperation among various heritage organizations and groups. The chapter also makes a strong contribution to the experiential teaching of history. As Gary would be the first to point out, cooperation among agencies is of little value if it fails to excite interest and knowledge in the pupils. Gary's enthusiastic account does not hide the difficulties to be overcome and should serve to inspire history teachers everywhere to explore the heritage potential within their own communities.

Introduction

"History" is boring. We teachers have lived with this common, and sometimes justified, complaint from all levels and abilities of students. Realizing that my school system was not using the wealth of historical opportunities that existed in our own communities, I undertook to make history exciting by using community resources as the sites for students to truly experience history. The set of programs called *History Comes Alive* was designed and piloted as a series of historical simulations and activities in local heritage sites. The sites were developed to be the tools for direct experiential learning. Textbooks, the focus of so many complaints about memorization of unimportant facts, became secondary resources. Students from kindergarten to college were about to find out that history relived is history discovered. And it is far from boring.

This chapter demonstrates how local historical sites were developed to provide interactive experiences for students. These experiences led to exciting accomplishments and learning covering all areas of student achievement. Sample activities are described, and student and teacher responses are outlined as examples of experiential learning in a historical context.

Developing the Programs

Assumptions

Students learn best by doing. But how can grade school children "do" history? I decided that students could learn to understand and appreciate their heritage by reliving the past. This is achieved by simulating, as realistically as possible, life in a specific historical setting, like living for three days and two nights aboard a decommissioned icebreaker. Spending at least one overnight period seemed necessary to gain the full benefit of reliving the historical setting. Students also use these experiences to explore their present social contexts.

History Comes Alive is more than a set of history lessons. There is a firm curriculum connection covering all subject areas in each

package including music, technology, drama, and computers. Although central importance is given to the on-site experiential field trip, I assume that the best learning takes place when students apply knowledge and have motivation across a variety of subject areas.

Programs involving out-of-school sites must engage the classroom teachers and site interpreters in cooperative and clearly defined roles. An important assumption is that the programs have to make sense to the people both in the schools and in the heritage sites and that clear, functional roles have to be defined for them.

Another mandate of *History Comes Alive* is the stimulation of each individual student, the development of motivation and self-direction as they learn to appreciate their heritage. At the same time, working cooperatively within a healthy social structure is also valued.

The Inventory

The first task was to establish an inventory of possible historical opportunities for learning. The list of possible resources turned out to be staggering. Imagine the chance to set programs of study comparing a 17th-century fur trading post with a 19th-century British fort staffed by uniformed interpreters. A museum of marine history had potential for studying firsthand the archaeology of our past as a shipbuilding centre, trans-shipment port, and the only inland British naval dockyard in the Empire. There was a 200-mile waterway and a canal system engineered and constructed through primeval bush 150 years ago. Finally, there was a fully interpreted 19th-century residence of our country's founding Prime Minister, a National Historic Site managed by Parks Canada, the federal agency responsible for National Parks. With this wealth of experiential learning possibilities, the challenge was not to find sites but to prioritize their relevance in providing situational learning experiences matched to the school's curriculum.

Designing the Activities

The next task was to get cooperation from the federal, provincial, and private agencies who operate the sites to design hands-on experiences for student excursions. This meant going beyond the more usual, forgettable outings: "Walk through, listen, and do not touch anything." Another change for the agencies was to connect proposed activities with learning outcomes required by the government-authorized curriculum.

Initially, I undertook to develop the educational potential in one of Canada's foremost historical fortifications, Fort Henry. The development matched the Ontario Ministry of Education history curriculum guidelines for Grades 7-9 students, entitled "Early Canadian Communities" and "Building the Nation." It took a year of challenging negotiations with the personnel who manage and operate Fort Henry to organize and prepare a set of activities. At the same time, a working relationship between school teachers and interpreters at the Fort was established which promised to continue the program for a long period.

I quickly learned that developing these activities would require overcoming red tape which had little to do with curriculum. It was necessary to convince the Fire Marshal's Office that fortifications built of huge limestone blocks would not be burned down by careless youth. The Health Department officials had to be persuaded that washroom and cooking facilities would not cause scurvy, smallpox, or other diseases of the time period of study. With patience, it was possible to receive splendid cooperation from all parties and agencies involved. Today, thousands of students from our own county, other parts of Ontario, and neighbouring New York State participate in the Fort Henry educational programs.

A similar set of negotiations was conducted to establish each of the other programs. One of the most productive ones involved establishing a working partnership among our School Board, Parks Canada (the national parks service) and its local interpreters, the Rideau Canal Museum Board, and community residents in Chaffey's Locks, a small village on the Rideau Canal. It is a remarkable contribution to education when agencies and individuals like these work together with students in such a direct

and positive manner. These partnerships are constantly being updated and sustained at meetings with all parties involved.

These successful negotiations with multiple agencies and individuals gave me the experience I needed to develop a set of activities where students would relive the marine past of the Great Lakes through investigative research and archaeological study of local shipbuilding. If red tape seemed to be a stumbling block earlier, imagine trying to convince officials that 36 students could live aboard a moored, decommissioned, 210-ft. Coast Guard vessel of 1,607 tons, using it as a classroom for two or three days and nights! The key step was to convince people to let us pilot our project while assuring parents there would be no moonlight diving off the crow's nest. A series of successful excursions soon overcame concerns and original objections. We were even allowed to take off our life jackets!

The role of the classroom teacher is to act as facilitator and generate a high level of interest in the unit of study. The teacher should introduce the program using motivational materials, both print and non-print, and arrange to provide follow-up materials (videos, archival documents, computing resources, guest speakers, and books). Children need to be prepared not only attitudinally for the program but also with suitable clothing and equipment for the outing. The teachers must open, and maintain, close communication with the site interpreters.

The role of the site interpreters is to bring the magic and drama of the historical simulations to life. The interpreters create the atmosphere in which students are caught up in their roles as people living in historical settings. Interpreters are also the expert sources of information, providing specific site-related knowledge and insights which teachers may not reasonably have.

Communication is vital to the success of the programs. There must be pre-trip discussions between the classroom teacher and the site interpreters to clarify mutual expectations in logistics and instruction. When both parties recognize each other's enthusiasm and commitment, there is a high probability for success.

Support Documents

Once designed and tested, each program is outlined in a support document which describes the program's activities and the required preparations and procedures to use when arranging a visit. *History Comes Alive* currently contains five programs.

"Fort Henry: An Educational Experience" outlines the range of experiential visits to Fort Henry, lasting from a few hours to an overnight stay. The Fort Henry program now provides experiences of life in a 19th-century fort suited to ages from kindergarten to adult.

"The Rideau Canal: An Educational Outing" outlines the comparative studies available along the 100-mile-long waterway and canal system joining Lake Ontario to the Ottawa River to the north. Students experience the daily life of workers along the canal system and at locks built in the early 1800s. Both day trips and overnight visits are possible.

"The Marine Museum of the Great Lakes: Shipbuilding in Kingston" focuses on the early shipbuilding and transportation activity in the area. The Museum itself is a rich collection of marine artifacts and archaeological research. A decommissioned Coast Guard vessel, moored at the Museum, provides a realistic site to experience life on board a working Great Lakes ship. Overnight stays on the ship and the associated hands-on learning highlight this unit of study and make it adaptable to various age and grade levels.

"Historic Kingston: Walking Through our Past" encourages students to walk through the city of King's Town as though it were the early 1800s. Excursions vary in duration but they are all detailed, with self-guiding features designed to support individual interests and curiosity. Stops at major points of interests must be arranged in advance.

"Our Historic Waterfront by Ship or Sail" outlines the options to explore the historic waterfront with its mix of military and commercial activity, ancient and modern. Students choose between boarding a sail training ship or a replica paddle steamer. Costumed interpreters and crew help provide a touch of realism with information about the significance of the vessels and the waterfront in the students' heritage.

Sample Programs

Each of the five programs in the set has a different character, but they have common features. Careful preparation is required. Students often wear some aspect of period costume; they live out several aspects of life in the setting being studied. Where possible, they sleep at least one night within the historical context. The heritage experience is extended in subsequent classroom work, which may include writing journals, extracting information from related historical documents, works of art and drama, cooking period food from authentic recipes, and preparing a celebration of the unit of study for parents and friends.

These common elements will be illustrated by examples from the Fort Henry and Rideau Canal programs.

The Fort Henry Experience

The central feature of the Fort Henry experience is playing the role of a recruit in a British regiment of the mid-19th century. Students wear uniform tunics and caps and perform recruit drills of the period while surrounded by the sights, sounds, smells, and mystique of the great stone fort. All of this is under the watchful eye and noisy guidance of the recruit Corporal—for many students, as for military recruits anywhere, it is their worst nightmare. They also meet kindliness and concern as a second costumed interpreter, the Corporal's assistant, gives students helpful advice and suggestions just in time to be ready for the next inspection. The students literally step into learning the meticulous attention to detail of the life and daily struggles of the 19th-century British soldier. "What do you mean no walkmans, no video games, no hair dryers, or no makeup! Why would we want to go to some place like this?" sums up the initial reaction of a Grade 8 student.

Students sleep in barrack rooms on replica cast-iron cots and take their meals in the mess of the period. The ceremonial events of garrison life, such as flag lowering and raising, with proper musketry salutes, are carefully followed. The evening is a more relaxed time for storytelling and experiencing a lesson in the fort's school room.

Most students today have never experienced strict discipline such as that of a British regiment 150 years ago. For the duration of their visit, the students, as regimental recruits, are taught this discipline. For giggling, yawning, or not answering with the proper, "Yes, Corporal!", they receive extra sentry duty, the task of polishing cannons, or run laps around the parade square. This makes a lasting impression on all young recruits.

The Rideau Canal Experience

The Rideau Canal was an engineering marvel of its day. It still operates as a waterway joining Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River to the Ottawa River, some 200 miles to the north. Historically, it was a strategic device to link the safer inland Canadian capital with the vulnerable but economically valuable trade routes along the uneasy border with the United States of America. Building the canal was an epic undertaking for which large numbers of surveyors, masons, and labourers had to be obtained. Communities, which now hold some 150 years of canal history, sprang up as many of those people took their reward in the form of land grants along the waterway.

In this program, students play the parts of canal workers. Students may also examine and research four lockstations along the Canal, acting as mapmakers and Royal Engineers in a comparative study. Local residents in a village along the canal accommodate the young workers in their Community Hall. Community members within our partnership supply authentic period meals to the students after a tiring day of researching the Canal. They then bunk down on the Hall floor for a well-deserved rest.

The Celebration

The Celebration is the finale to a unit study in *History Comes Alive*. Parents, relatives, and others, like media invitees or agency personnel, gather with the students at the historical site. Students dress up in period costumes to describe their experiences in an evening of fun and demonstration of the joy of learning. Students

display their curriculum work: written journals, diaries, and research papers. Creative murals and descriptive artwork line the walls, and technological and family-studies projects they created in shops and workrooms are displayed on the tables. Food of the day, which was prepared by the students, is enjoyed by all. Proud parents and guests listen attentively as educated students retell their experiences, all with remarkable retention of facts and descriptive recollection of the time period of study.

One of the personal and professional joys for the teacher in the celebration is to witness the public demonstration of students' accomplishments. It is the reward for the expenditure of energy and risk in leaving the safety of textbook and classroom.

Discussion

Responses of Participants

Through role playing life in earlier times, students suspend disbelief and quickly gain a sense of authenticity.

> I felt I returned to the past as I put on the artillery uniform. As the sergeant-major bellowed "Steady UP!" at me, a reality of having been transformed into the past truly sank in. I was a recruit of 1867. (Grade 8 student journal)

> For me the highlight was the way in which the soldiers at the Fort were able to suspend our disbelief, by sheer force of personality and unflinching attention to their roles, and allow us to get an authentic feel for what it was like to step from civilian life into the discipline of Her Majesty's army circa 1867. (Education professor)

Of special vivid recollection for students, adults included, is the use of the outhouses over earth pits as toilets. They record very descriptively their experiences of the "little ol' building out back":

> The curses of nature were truly felt. Cold toilet seats, humongous spiders and their webs, the smell, the noises at night make one realize true fear and a hurried trip to the outhouse. (Student teacher)

The popularity of "Fort Henry: An Educational Experience" far surpassed original expectations as over 1,400 students have annually discovered this part of their heritage. The numbers of participants in the other programs are rising as more educators become aware of the opportunities for out-of-classroom learning. Students not only learned, but also discovered the joy of learning. The diversity of activities in the programs works to challenge students at all levels of capabilities. This includes provisions for special-needs students to access all facets of the programs. Gaining knowledge through hands-on experiences lets students who learn in a different way shine in group situations.

Teachers note an improved climate in the classroom and a trend for students to be more responsible. There is a higher level of discussion among students, and observable gains in retention. Teachers participating in the programs praise the opportunities for building life skills, with improved problem solving and cooperation as important accomplishments.

> Even the sawdust on the floor needed to be swept up and beds aligned. Our group, as a matter of survival from the Private's wrath, quickly bonded and worked cooperatively as a team. (University student)

Opportunities to sketch, sing, and incorporate drama into their understanding while in historical settings allowed creative growth and expression while replacing formal lectures and testing within the classroom. Teachers watch with delight as real learning is experienced. The students truly are the players as each drama unfolds.

> The students relate to reliving their past as actors in a play, and working together is the best method of learning. We all had to place ourselves into the time warp. (Grade 8 teacher)

Learning doesn't stop when the role playing ends and the bus rolls back to school. Follow-up discussions, related role playing at school, assignments, and library research encourage expansion and extension of the experience. Learning stimulated by live experience spans across subject and grade boundaries. When students sleeping deep inside Fort Henry learn that moisture dripping on the walls

was rainfall from years ago working its way through the cracks in the fortification, it becomes a future geology lesson.

> Facts stay in your mind a lot longer if you experience them first and you enjoy it much more too. I'd go back again soon. (Grade 8 student journal)

Students are intrigued by the story of a soldier's widow bursting into tears when asked by the Sergeant for her hand in marriage while leaving the cemetery. The Sergeant quickly apologizes for his untimely proposal. The widow explains her tears are not for her dead husband but for the fact that she accepted a Private's proposal at the graveside. Discovering that wives of soldiers who died on duty had 30 days to pick a new mate from the ranks of unmarried soldiers or leave the Fort generates lively discussion of social customs, then and now.

> It's better than staying cooped up in a boring classroom. You don't have as much fun learning from books and you sure don't remember as much. (Grade 8 student journal)

Keeping the Programs Alive

Innovations in education, especially ones that take the students out of school, are vulnerable to collapse. There are two issues. One is keeping the program fresh, innovative, and responsive to changing community needs; the other is to sustain and renew the partnerships with various government and private groups that make the programs possible.

History Comes Alive is not sitting on its laurels because, to survive, programs must be updated and reviewed constantly. New resource materials, reports of teaching methods, and plans actually used from teachers who have participated in activities strengthen and renew the overall package. Writing for new curriculum units which also involve overnight stays is a continual process. New resource materials are routinely produced while improving older materials with motivating pre- and post-visit activities.

The programs thrive. There are rapidly growing numbers of participants. One cooperating agency, Parks Canada, is becoming a leader in the development of experiential education. Parks personnel are working with representatives of school boards and other agencies to create a 100-mile-long heritage classroom along an historic trade and colonization route. Parks Canada granted a sabbatical to one of their educational interpreters to set this plan in motion, to strengthen the existing partnerships already in place, and to recruit new participants. Support from other central authorities gives hope that further developments are possible in the future.

Meetings between representatives of our formed partnerships and teachers who use the programs also helps ensure the continued success of *History Comes Alive*. These meetings are revealing in

two ways: first, teachers make remarkably strong statements about how the class climate changed for the better after participating in one of the programs. Teachers report noticing greater overall retention, as well as more cooperative and helpful students after their visits. Such positive reports are encouraging for agency and community representatives. Second, the very fact that nonschool agencies would participate in such meetings to exchange feedback and perceptions demonstrates serious reflection and desire to ensure and sustain high quality. Commitment is found in practice as well as in rhetoric.

In-service training and development for the programs is critical. It was important to communicate first with those who have the authority to make school decisions on curriculum and field trips. I presented *History Comes Alive* initially to senior administrators and, once having received their support, met with school principals and curriculum resource teachers who oversee excursion planning and organization. Having resource packages for each program available for all interested teachers provides written follow-up material.

Teacher in-service is accomplished by circulating information about existing and emerging programs to teachers. Program excerpts, teacher and student reports, and highlights from individual visits are published and circulated. There are workshops and poster sessions sponsored by individual schools, school boards, and other interested organizations. Careful pre-service work and well-refined support documents enable teachers to make thorough pre-visit preparation with their classes. That preparation makes them partners in a learning enterprise that virtually guarantees success.

Applications in Other Places

Not every school district is as fortunate in having fortifications, historic waterways, or residences of their nation's founders readily accessible. Nevertheless, heritage is present wherever we live and it is the challenge of educators, working through partnerships, to develop experiential learning programs to bring the local heritage to life. Initially, as I did, one must examine which facilities,

whether historic sites or other unique situational learning opportunities, would be potential, hands-on learning sites. Those already present with interpretive personnel or educational facilitators are obviously likely choices.

One must be careful to ensure that the facilities chosen as sites will allow for expansion and in-depth experiences to meet curriculum needs. A benefit to the heritage site is an increased market. Already *History Comes Alive* activities have expanded to include stays by youth groups like Scouts, tourist groups, senior travelling groups, staffs from neighbouring school boards, and business groups.

The words of one participant convey the enriching benefits of this type of experience:

> *History Comes Alive* provides students with a post-modern, first-hand experience—a memory of a memory of the past. The cobwebs covering my earlier studies [of history] were being dusted off by an innovative approach to education. (Student teacher)

I believe that valid learning experiences will create long lasting impressions. I enjoy watching children and adults alike participate as they experience an engrossing event. Such programs do enhance learning and provide many cherished memories, both academic and personal. Our past, our present, and their implications for our future can be experienced and each individual's quest for knowledge enhanced to allow them to develop to their potential. Educational experiences such as these are the many important minutes in time that will last for years.